

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 TRSE-00 /057 W
-----130502 061901Z /45

R 051010Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY DACCA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5683
INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
CONCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 4345

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, BG
SUBJECT: ATAUR RAHMAN KHAN CALLS FOR SINGLE PARTY

REF: A. 76 DACCA 6302; B. DACCA 4311

1. ATAUR RAHMAN KHAN, THE PRESIDENT OF THE SMALL JATIYO (NATIONAL) LEAGUE AND ONE OF BANGLADESH'S MOST SENIOR POLITICIANS, ISSUED A LONG PRESS STATEMENT JULY 31ST CALLING FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS AND, PERHAPS MORE SIGNIFICANT, THE CREATION OF A SINGLE POLITICAL PARTY. "WE MEAN TO ASSIST THE GROWTH OF A MODERATE CENTER", HE DECLARED. "BY A BROAD-BASED PARTY, WE DO NOT MEAN A MOTLEY COLLECTION OF HETEROGENEOUS ELEMENTS WITH IRRECONCILABLE POLITICAL VIEWS FLOCKING TOGETHER AS A MATTER OF POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY." INSTEAD, ATAUR EXPLAINED, "WE MEAN TO WELD A GROUP OF SEVERAL GROUPS OF NATIONALISTIC AND DEMOCRATIC ELEMENTS WITH SIMILAR BELIEFS."

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2. ATAUR'S PRESS RELEASE, WHICH SEEMED PART CAMPAIGN SPEECH AND PART PARTY MANIFESTO, SUGGESTED THAT "A PARTY WITH REQUISITE LEADERSHIP, STRENGTH AND SUPPORT OF THE MASSES WOULD COMPEL THE GOVERNMENT TO THE REALIZATION THAT EARLY ELECTIONS TO INITIATE A DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IS NOT ONLY DESIRABLE BUT AN INESCAPABLE FACT." HE CAUTIONED THOSE WHO ARE IN POWER TODAY "EITHER BY ACCIDENT

OR FATE" TO SHOULDER THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BEGIN THE PROCESS. OTHERWISE, HE WARNED, THE POLITICAL VACUUM NOW EXISTING IN THE COUNTRY WILL LEAD TO STRIFE AND THE COUNTRY WILL "MOVE FROM CHAOS TO CHAOS" AND DEMOCRACY WILL BE DELAYED INDEFINITELY.

3. THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME FOR ATAUR TO SUGGEST A UNIFIED POLITICAL MOVEMENT. LAST DECEMBER, HE CONVENED THE NATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND RESISTANCE COMMITTEE (REFTEL), COMPOSED OF CENTER AND LEFT POLITICAL FIGURES. AT THE TIME, MANY OBSERVERS SURMISED THAT ATAUR HAD HAD SOME GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGEMENT, AS IT WAS THEN WIDELY BELIEVED THAT ZIA WAS LOOKING FOR A NON-CONTROVERSIAL SENIOR POLITICIAN AS A "PRIME MINISTER" OR "SENIOR ADVISOR" IN ORDER TO GIVE SOME POLITICAL BASE TO HIS GOVERNMENT. IN THE ENSUING MONTHS, ATAUR'S COMMITTEE BECAME MORIBUND, BUT THE RUMORS OF HIGH APPOINTMENT CONTINUED. WITH HIS CURRENT STATEMENT, THERE ARE AGAIN SUGGESTIONS THAT HE HAD ZIA'S SUPPORT. PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ATAUR'S CALL HAS COME FROM ONLY TWO OR THREE EQUALLY TINY PARTIES, ALTHOUGH THE ENGLISH PRESS HAS GIVEN THE SUPPORT WIDE PUBLICITY.

4. COMMENT: ATAUR RAHMAN KHAN, ALTHOUGH A SENIOR POLITICIAN, COMMANDS VERY LITTLE POLITICAL SUPPORT. HE NEEDS ZIA A LOT MORE THAN ZIA NEEDS HIM. ATAUR'S MAIN ATTRACTIONS AT PRESENT ARE THAT HE IS NON-CONTROVERSIAL AND WELL KNOWN CONFIDENTIAL

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FROM HIS DAYS AS CHIEF MINISTER OF EAST PAKISTAN JUST BEFORE AYUB TOOK OVER. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT ATAUR IS ANXIOUS TO PLAY THE ROLE OF SENIOR STATESMAN IN BANGLADESH, AND HIS CALL FOR A UNIFIED PARTY IS A MANIFESTATION OF THAT AMBITION. WHAT IS OF INTEREST IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT-OWNED ENGLISH PRESS IS GIVING HIS STATEMENTS WIDE COVERAGE. HOWEVER, HIS MOVE DOES NOT FIT IN WITH THE MORE PLAUSIBLE (EVEN IF REMOTE) POSSIBILITY THAT ZIA MAY LOOK TO THE CONSERVATIVE (AND BETTER ORGANIZED) FACTION OF THE AWAMI LEAGUE AND EXK DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE FORCES (SEE REFTEL B). SINCE SENDING THAT MESSAGE WE HAVE FURTHER REPORTS THAT ZIA MAY BE STIMULATING A RIGHT OF CENTER MERGER UNDER HIS AEGIS. ATAUR'S SUPPORT APPEARS TO BE COMING PRIMARILY FROM THE LEFT. BERGESEN

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Message Attributes

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